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Title of proposed paper: Tense and markedness in Mali Baining.

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Mali (2,200 speakers) is a member of the Baining language family, East New Britain Province Papua New Guinea. It is a non-Austronesian language showing a mix of Austronesian and non-Austronesian traits. Mali is an agglutinating language (eg., noun class marking, agreement, prepositional verbs) with some head marking (possessive constructions, concordial pronouns in verb complex) and split-S marking associated with AVO word order. In this paper I present data relating to the expression of tense in Mali. Mali makes use of two systems for encoding tense. Firstly, the verbal system tense marking system is associated with around 70% of the verbs in the language. In this system, tense distinctions are expressed by stem initial mutations. There are three classes of verbs in this system: one distinguishes past / present / future, while the other two classes distinguish present / non-present. The remaining verbs in the language do not encode tense distinctions. The phonological changes involved are wide-spread in the language, with similar alternations used to encode specificity on nouns. The second system for encoding tense involves concordial pronouns in A/SA position. These are organised into two series that encode a past/non-past distinction. I argue that the 'present' forms of the verb stems and the 'past' forms of the pronouns are in fact functionally unmarked. Evidence for this claim comes from the interaction of the pronominal and verbal systems of tense marking as well as from asymmetrical serial verb constructions encoding aspectual distinctions. It is also consistent with the use of present tense clauses to encode background information in discourse.